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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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"KENNEDY'S WORK STILL UNDONE"

As the nation recently observed the twentieth anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's death, I could not help noting how many of the challenges he faced are still very much with us. Most of the major problems Kennedy had to address during his short-lived administration still belong at the very top of our national agenda.

It was Kennedy's belief that, in the long run, nothing would be more important than cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union to protect the world from the dangers of nuclear arms. He regarded the landmark Nuclear Test Ban Treaty as only a small step. He saw the very future of the world as dependent on two things: First, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the other nuclear powers had to come to an agreement for the gradual reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. Kennedy knew that this had to be done with due regard for American security. The Cuban Missile Crisis taught him that it was difficult but not impossible to deal with the Russians.

Less known was President Kennedy's concern with the proliferation of nuclear technology to smaller countries. I personally would put the danger of proliferation ahead even of the danger of U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Imagine what the future will hold unless we prevent unstable dictators like Libya's Khadafi or Iran's Khomeini from attaining nuclear capabilities.

This year, perhaps to an even greater extent than 20 years ago, Congress and the American people are deeply divided over how much to spend on defense and how much on domestic needs. I think America has made a terrible mistake in the Reagan years in cutting back on programs for the aged, health care, and education. In the defense areas, little has changed since the Kennedy days. Waste and corruption at the Pentagon still hide under cover of patriotism.

One of the issues in the Kennedy-Nixon debates was prayer in the public schools. It seems odd to me that this issue continues to excite a substantial segment of the American people. Is it not more important to infuse our society with the values of compassion and concern for the poor, the weak, and the powerless rather than to adopt a fixed liturgy for our schools?

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As we debate America's role in El Salvador and Nicaragua, I cannot help but recall John Kennedy's eloquent epigram: "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make bloody revolution inevitable." We cannot stop change in Central America or elsewhere. We can, however, help determine its nature and direction.

Despite the fact that John Kennedy was a hard-boiled Irish politician from Boston, he was capable of taking a long view based on the most gentle and humane sentiments. He believed we should ultimately fulfill the promise of the Constitution which asserts the right of all people to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness".

Kennedy frequently paraphrased ancient Greek philosophy in defining happiness as 'the opportunity for full use of one's powers along lines of excellence'.

There are still far too many Americans and human beings around the world whose lives are light years away from this idyllic state of opportunity and self-realization. The Kennedy blend of the ability to face hard facts without surrendering dreams is what our nation needs most today.

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